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Present and presences in the late 20th-century art and fashion: Alexander McQueen and Rachel Whiteread's ghosts

Abstract

Past and present coexist in the creations of the fashion designer Alexander McQueen and in the works of the contemporary artist Rachel Whiteread. McQueen reflected on the relationship between past and present and on the dehumanization of contemporary society. Similarly, Rachel Whiteread focused on physical and intimate spaces, deprived of human presence. This essay analyses contemporary art and fashion together, as two contemporary expressive forms of the tumult and anxieties of 20th-century London.

Keywords

Fashion at the edge, Young British artists, Present

1. Sociological premise: self-negation in contemporary art and fashion

Contemporary art and fashion are part of an ever-changing process. In fact, both fashion and art are symptoms of the society in which they develop, and today's society is frenetic and unstable. In spite of the consumerist society's tendency to be projected towards the future without looking back, the past always comes back to the present, through different shapes and styles. Art and fashion are naturally projected towards change, as analyzed by Niklas Luhmann (2000) and Georg Simmel (1974), who discuss art and fashion very similarly. Through these studies, it is possible to understand the ontological connection between art and fashion.

According to Luhmann, even though systems always strive to stay independent from exterior influences, they are inevitably influenced by the environment, in the so-called "feedback-loop". Art is a particular

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kind of communication, standing between social systems and psychic systems. Its role is to express the clash between these two. Art is different from all the other systems, because it does not need linguistic communication to survive; in fact, it is based on perception and it exists to challenge communication and meaning.

Art is autopoietic, as it includes self-negation into the system (Luhmann 2000: 292). Through self-negation, art expresses its need to deny itself in order to assert its independence from the society and to reach the highest level of autonomy. This is possible thanks to the eternal oscillation between internal and external, which is a challenge of the art system to itself, consisting in the inclusion within its domain of what is normally excluded (Luhmann 2000: 293). When self-negation is introduced into the art system, art becomes self-descriptive and it overcomes all that came before its self-denial. With Duchamp's *Fountain* or Warhol's *Brillo boxes*, for instance, commodities were turned into art, in order to challenge the art market and assert the independence of the artists' creation from the commerce and social expectations.

Art becomes inimitable and the aim of the artist is to overcome what was done previously through negation. Artists have to irritate the public and, when the audience does not respond to a provocation anymore, they have to propose a new challenge. Hence, the perpetual change and oscillation that characterize art are the only way to keep it alive (Luhmann 2000: 294). Consequently, Luhmann states that "why a work of art is a work of art [...] remains a mystery, as if this mystery were meant to symbolize the unobservability of the world" (Luhmann 2000: 294).

Similarly to Luhmann's reflection on art's nature, Georg Simmel states that fashion is able to express the instability of contemporary society, and the more agitated reality is, the more rapid the changes in fashion will be (Simmel 1971: 302). The self-negation that Luhmann attributes to the art field is part of the nature of fashion as well, which oscillates between universal acceptance and its own self-destruction (Simmel 1971: 302). A fashion trend of a specific period starts as something original, which is proposed and adopted by a restricted circle. When this trend is imitated and becomes universal, it dies, because it loses its peculiarity (Simmel 1971: 302). This is where the similarity between contemporary art and fashion resides: art destroys itself when it does not irritate the audience any longer; fashion annihilates itself when it loses its originality. Hence, fashion is always at the border between past and future, giving a stronger impression of the present

(Simmel 1971: 303). According to Caroline Evans, fashion fetishizes novelty, because, although based on innovation, it is always influenced by the past (Evans 2003: 20).

As stated by Simmel, in the fashion system past and present live together, because, although fashion is based on a continuous change, it also has a natural tendency to save its energy (Simmel 1971: 320). As a consequence of such a “recycling” activity, old shapes often reappear in the present, under modern reinterpretations (Simmel 1971: 320). Fashion is based on the balance between the destruction of old forms and the creation of new elements, two antithetical activities which cannot be separated (Simmel 1971: 306).

In contemporary society, fashion has already overcome its own limits, as it has influenced different aspects of people’s lives, such as taste, morality, theoretical thinking (Simmel 1971: 304), and, recently, art. As previously stated, the self-negation process enacted by art consists in the inclusion of what was previously excluded. Considering this, fashion could be part of such a process, in which the fashion system and the art system not only influence one another, but they include one in the other’s domain, in order to express together the contemporary clash between psyche and society. It is possible to say that art and fashion are contaminating one another.

2. Aesthetic premise: “the abuse of beauty” in contemporary art and fashion

Art, as Luhmann asserts, is a special type of communication based on perception and located between the system society and the system psyche. The aim of its self-negation is not to deny art itself, but to represent society as a system that contains its own negation and that continuously clashes with the system psyche. Such a clash mirrors the instability of modern society, which art aims at bringing to light (Luhmann 2000: 295). For this reason, in contemporary times, academic aesthetics is dead (Luhmann 2000: 296), because beauty and perfection cannot express the tumult of modern times. In this sense, art becomes completely independent and self-referential, because it can only be defined by the art world itself, and, more specifically, by the artist that created the work. The material aspect of the work is fundamental, because it contains the idea expressed by the creation, but, beyond this, it does not take any further responsibility and it concentrates on irritating the

observer (Luhmann 2000: 296).

Paul Virilio states that contemporary art is anti-historical, because it can survive only in present times and thanks to the perpetual negation of its past and future: “art is of the moment” (Lotringer and Virilio 2005: 47). Art is an expression of modernity thanks to its instantaneity, which is a manifestation of the fast-paced contemporary society and technological progress (Lotringer and Virilio 2005: 47). As a result, since art has started to include what was normally excluded from its domain, each success gained by it has turned out to be a failure (Lotringer and Virilio 2005: 64). This does not imply that the XX and XXI-century arts were not valuable, because a failure is an “incident”, which is positive, because it reveals something important that otherwise we would have never been aware of. Furthermore, modern art is affected by an “aesthetic contamination”, which does not mean either that it is bad or good, but it means that there is something interfering with it, and this is the modern world. For this reason, art is dead today, since it has become anti-historical.

Both art and fashion are autopoietic systems, whose mortality is paradoxically determined by their self-destructive natures. Fashion is immortal, in spite of the transience of its single manifestations (Lotringer and Virilio 2005: 319). Fashion is an independent entity, which is able to mirror the historical context and the traumas that characterize it, autonomously even from its creator (Evans 2003: 6). As it is true for art, not everything can be considered a form of fashion, Simmel asserts. Potentially, any object can become art, but the sovereignty of art on reality does not imply that any aspect of existence can be included into its domain (Simmel 1971: 320). The same can be said for fashion, because, although theoretically any form could be part of it, not all of them are actually suitable (Simmel 1971: 321). What is fundamental for both art and fashion is that the ideas they want to communicate are contained in a concrete form, which has to communicate exteriorly the interior message.

Both contemporary fashion and art have enacted a process of self-reflection and self-questioning. Contemporary art questioned its evolutionary process, which tended towards an ever more illusionistic representation of the external world, hiding the artistic artifice and linking closely the meaning of a work to its appearance. Contemporary art, and Pop art in particular, turned art into philosophy and the artist into a philosopher. In fact, you cannot distinguish art from non-art based on its aesthetics any longer. Arthur Danto, in his essay, *The abuse of beauty*,

explains very clearly the change that occurred in the arts of the 1960's.

Danto wonders how can you distinguish Andy Warhol's *Brillo boxes* from the soap boxes you could find in any supermarket in the US. The difference between the original object and its artistic reproduction is almost impossible to discern, as art is no longer comprehensible only through aesthetics. For this reason, Danto asserts that art is dead. Starting from the 20th century, beauty in art is no longer based on aesthetics, because beauty has almost completely disappeared from the artistic reality of this period, "as if attractiveness was somehow a stigma, with its crass commercial implications" (Danto 2003: 7).

Beauty has become "internal", because the exterior appearance of a creation is not inextricably connected to the internal meaning of the work. The beauty of an object resides in its meaning and its aesthetic connotation is not that relevant. This is the case of Duchamp's *Fountain* or of Warhol's *Brillo boxes* (Danto 2003: 13). In these two masterpieces, beauty resides in their meaning, in their internal essence. Beauty is just incidental to the work itself, which had all other intentions than being "attractive" (Danto 2003: 9).

Also contemporary fashion, especially at the end of the 1980s-beginning of 1990s, is characterized by a new vision of beauty. John Galiano, for instance, proposes a decadent and melancholic beauty, inspired by *fin de siècle* models, whereas Alexander McQueen uses very often lacerated fabrics, unperfected hems, and worn out models. This tendency in fashion can be defined as deconstructivist. Fashion, in fact, does not try to hide flows or internal contradictions any longer. Beauty loses its transcendental quality and the designer is no more a creative genius: construction and design phases of clothes are left exposed, showing their different layers (Arnold 2001: 22). In addition to the neo-romantic tendency represented by Galliano and McQueen, a new "poor" style emerges. Clothes have to look consumed, worn out, and have a bad fit on models. Even poverty is made theatrical and exaggerated, as explained by Arnold Koda: "Worn by alienated British Youths, the exaggerated, theatrical aspects of the poverty references suggest self-satire and the nihilistic hedonism of economic frustration [...]" (Arnold 2001: 25).

This deconstructivist style, which was born in the 1980s and progressed through the 1990s, was particularly suitable for such an unstable historical moment. The society in those years was freer from prejudices, but, at the same time, identities were confused and social roles were

blurred. On the one hand, social transformation, the action of homosexual and feminist activists meant a fundamental step forward in the contemporary society, but, on the other hand, it also caused an inevitable destabilization. In addition to this, the consumerist trend bombarded people every day with new models to follow and to fit in (Arnold 2001: 25). The luring ads on the mass media tried to hide poverty. The role of fashion was to unveil the truth deconstructing itself through violent and unpleasant images, such as Alexander McQueen's models, who walked covered in earth and fake blood. They represented that horror that fashion was supposed to hide with models of ideal beauty.

This is what Caroline Evans defines *fashion at the edge*, a kind of fashion "which exists at its own margins" (Evans 2003: 4). Evans explains that in the 1990s a new kind of conceptual fashion was born with the aim of representing the violent economic and social changes that characterized that period. Fashion became a medium to represent the traumas, fears, preoccupations, desolation, disease, and even death. Fashion got rid of any form of sentimentalism and it started to include notions which were normally part of other domains, such as history, philosophy, and art. Evans' fashion at the edge, of which Alexander McQueen is one of the main representatives, is at the edge thematically, stylistically, commercially, and conceptually.

These creations free fashion from all those stereotypical conceptions that are often attributed to it, such as frivolity and superficiality. Fashion can take advantage from its great expressive freedom, in order to enact a process of self-reflection and to represent directly the traumas caused by cultural repression. The role of fashion is to express these traumas, so that they can be exorcised and overcome. Furthermore, the main characteristic of fashion is its mutability, which makes it a perfect expression of the 20th century. Rebecca Arnold asserts that fashion can represent both the promises and the menaces of the future, revealing our desires and our fears, and building identities through clothes (Arnold 2001: 7).

3. Young British artists and Alexander McQueen: provocations in the late 20th-century art and fashion

The greatest part of the emerging artists in London, between the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, came from the Goldsmiths

College. The first occasion in which different Goldsmiths artists gathered for an exhibition was in 1988. The exhibition was named *Freeze*, took place at the Port of London Authority and was organized by the 24-year-old Damien Hirst, who was at the second year of college. Among the participating artists were Angela Bulloch, Mat Collishaw, Ian Davenport, Angus Fairhurst, Anya Gallaccio, Gary Hume, Abigail Lane, Michale Landy, Sarah Lucas, Richard Patterson, Simon Patterson, Fiona Rae, and Hirst himself (Arnold 2001: 19). The exhibition space was inspired by the Saatchi Gallery, one of the first cases in which an industrial building was used for art exhibition. The walls were left bare and painted in white by the artists. The works of art displayed were minimalist paintings and conceptual sculptures. This was the first occasion in which Hirst showcased his first “spot paintings”.

The most emblematic work, which anticipated the Young British artists' (YBA) taste for shock and provocation, was Matt Collishaw's *Bullet hole*. This was the close-up of a picture taken from G. Austin Gresham's, *A colour atlas of forensic pathology*, and it represented the wound on top of the victim's head, caused by an ice pick (in opposition to what the title suggested). This creation was exposed at *Freeze* and it was the source of inspiration for the title of the exhibition. Gregor Muir reports that the first line of the catalog read like this, “‘FREEZE’, the title, comes from Mat Collishaw's light box, dedicated to a moment of impact, a preserved now, a Freeze-frame” (Arnold 2001: 24).

Although London was still stuck in the financial crisis started on October 19, 1987, *Freeze* represented the moment in which the YBA started to attract attention and to get known in the British art scene.

The YBA proposed a friendlier kind of art, which got closer to people and tried to be more comprehensible to everyone. They operated in London during the economic crisis, which heavily affected the art market, so their works reflected on the relationship between art and the public and on the capitalist society. They tried to take advantage from capitalism, just like Andy Warhol did in the 1960s, making fun of it and emphasizing its most controversial aspects.

Both McQueen's and YBA's works brought to light the torments and concerns of those years, using unconventional forms. McQueen's fashion at the edge was permeated with references to death, existential uneasiness, and human vulnerability. Both fashion and art of the 1990s can be considered a “neurotic symbol” (Evans 2003: 6) of cultural disquiet.

The exhibition dedicated to Alexander McQueen at the Metropolitan Museum (Met) in New York City, in 2011, underlined a link between contemporary fashion and the art domain, as it represented fashion as a new medium of artistic expression. The exhibit titled *Savage beauty* was held from May 4 to August 7, 2011, one year after McQueen's death, and it was aimed at celebrating the designer's creative genius and significant contribution to the fashion world. The exhibition was curated by Andrew Bolton and Arold Koda, both of the Met Costume Institute. As Bolton put it, the title *Savage beauty* exemplifies the opposites incarnated by McQueen's creations: life and death, light and darkness, man and machine². The show included around one hundred clothes and accessories, which were selected from McQueen's archive in London, Givenchy archive in Paris, and private collections.

McQueen did not expect people to "like" his works. In fact, as he himself asserted, his aim was to generate strong, even extreme, reactions: "Distasteful images? But a reflection of a nasty world. And a powerful fashion designer always ingests the ether of modern times" (Bolton 2011: 12). McQueen wanted to irritate the audience emotionally, through the representation of their desires and anxieties³. He wanted the public to leave his fashion shows with some kind of emotions, possibly a "sublime" feeling. As a matter of fact, it is undeniable that his works were characterized by a deep romanticism, in the historic acceptance of the term. McQueen's creations were media to express his own fears and anxieties, and, more broadly, the traumas of his times. In fact, in the preface to *Savage beauty* catalog, Andrew Bolton writes: "for McQueen, fashion was not simply a channel for his own emotions. He saw it as a catalyst for the generation and cultivation of a heightened sensitivity to feelings" (Bolton 2011: 12).

Savage beauty was highly successful and it was one of the most visited exhibitions in the 142-year history of the Met (Salvioni 2012). After all, McQueen always considered himself a performance artist and, for this reason, he decided not to sell his creations for a long time. His works came from his attentive observation of the outer world and were

² See *Alexander McQueen: Savage beauty, gallery views 2011*, YouTube video, 8:31, posted by "The Met" (Metropolitan museum), May 10, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pg0HwLAJyV0>.

³ See *Alexander McQueen: Savage beauty, gallery views 2011*, YouTube video, 8:31, posted by "The Met" (Metropolitan museum), May 10, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pg0HwLAJyV0>.

a vehicle to express his own vision of beauty. He never adhered to harmonious and idealized aesthetics, which should conventionally dominate the fashion world. On the opposite, McQueen used a grotesque and disuniting style to communicate the tragedy of the historic crisis he experienced (Salvioni 2012).

The aim of both YBA's and McQueen's creations was not to underline the avant-gardism and virtuosity of their makers, but to give expression to existential themes that were common to anyone and to provoke strong emotional reactions. One of the themes treated both by McQueen and by the YBA artist Rachel Whiteread in particular was the return of the past and the human presence/absence in modern times and spaces.

4. Present, presences, and absences: Alexander McQueen and Rachel Whiteread's ghosts

Fashion at the edge faces the main issues of modernity, such as globalization and technological revolution, in an audacious and experimental way. Thomas P. Campbell, director of the Met, wrote in the *Savage beauty* catalog that McQueen treats themes that go far beyond fashion boundaries (Bolton 2011: 6). This is emblematically represented in the Autumn-Winter 1997-98 collection *Eclect dissect*, designed for Givenchy. The creepy idea that this show, and its title, wanted to suggest was that of a crazy scientist that had torn into pieces the models and then had put them back together, mixing up their parts. This show was a phantasmagorical dialogue between past and present. In modern society, very often, the past is forgotten and dismissed, as if it had lost meaning in the fast-paced present. In spite of this, the past never vanishes and it always comes back to haunt modern men and women. This show talks about the anxiety felt during a historical period that is only focused on the immediate present and whose speedy rhythm does not leave space for considering and reflecting on the past. The spectral link between past and present was metaphorically enacted by the models, who appeared to be like ghosts, who came back to haunt their aggressors (Evans 2003: 92).

In the fashion show *No. 13*, Spring-Autumn 1999, McQueen reflected on the capitalist present and on the exchange between man and machine. The show was inspired by Rebecca Horn's performance, in which two rifles shot to one another blood-red paint. In the 1999

show, instead, a model was placed at the center of the catwalk with a voluminous white dress. She was on a moving platform, that made the model revolve on herself. On both sides of the model, there were two robots that all of a sudden became “alive” and started to shoot yellow and black paint on the model’s body and white dress (Bolton 2001: 216). The model, in this case, was not just presenting the designer’s creation, but she was actually an actress, who amplified the spectacle and agitation of the moment through theatrical gestures⁴. This was the representation of McQueen’s dramatic reflection on the relationship between man and machine. The designer forecasted a science-fiction scenario, in which technology can become a menace and overwhelm its own creator. Because of his will to investigate the darkest sides of human existence, very often his shows were considered very difficult to be looked at. He himself admitted that “People find my things sometimes aggressive. But I don’t see it as aggressive. I see it as romantic, dealing with the dark side of personality”⁵.

McQueen’s reflection on, and critique of, the capitalist society is present in another show that he realized for Givenchy, Autumn-Winter 1999-2000. Also in this case, he represents the exchange between human and unhuman, by replacing the flesh-and-bone models with plastic mannequins. During the show, McQueen and his assistants were below the catwalk and put the mannequins on circular platforms that went up and down the outer runway, through hidden trapdoors. The public saw appearing and disappearing in front of them the mannequins, which were not clearly visible until a light was turned on and illuminated the plastic figures. Only in that moment the audience could realize that they were not looking at real models but just at unhuman mannequins⁶. The obscurity from which the mannequins emerged symbolized the dark side of capitalism and the plastic mannequins hinted at the technological transformation, which was turning men into “prosthetic gods” (Evans 2003: 94). This show was emptied of human presence, because humans were replaced by unanimated objects, creating a bridge between life and death, man and machine, presence and

⁴ See *Alexander McQueen Spring-Summer 1999*, YouTube video, 2:01, posted by “Couture day”, January 12, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErE7O5-NceGQ>.

⁵ See <http://blog.metmuseum.org/alexandermcqueen/about/>.

⁶ See *Givenchy haute couture Fall-Winter 1999, part 2*, YouTube video, 9:03, posted by “stylerunner7”, May 25, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I597ZG-wfrDE>.

absence. The mechanism that made the mannequins appear and disappear from the catwalk was a metaphor of the consumerist society: all that happened in the dark, under the trapdoors, was the symbol of the hidden consumerist dynamics, whereas the unveiling of the plastic mannequins, which replaced the models, epitomized the illusions of capitalism.

McQueen's specters, his attention for the past and his will to preserve it from the passing of time can be found in the sculptures made by the YBA Rachel Whiteread. Differently from the other YBAs, Whiteread did not study at Goldsmiths, but at Slade School of Fine Arts, and, compared to the others of the group, she was always more isolated from the mass media attention, even though her works had a strong impact on the public (Muir 2012: 43). Whiteread's sculptures were casts of common objects, such as chairs, tables, mattresses, bath tubs, and they made concrete the space around, above, and below the objects. These casts had the power to make indelible the impression left by the surface of such objects.

Her works are emptied of human presence, in the physical sense, but they can somehow make this absence and the memory of the presence tangible, thanks to the use of a very concrete matter. One of her most impressive creations was *Ghost*, made in 1990. It consisted in the cast of the interior of a room inside an old Victorian house, which the artist preventively deprived of its furniture. For three months, the artists made the separate casts of the interior of the room, including its walls, floor and ceiling, and then reassembled all these parts together (Muir 2012: 43). At a first examination, this work appears as a monolithic block of chalk, but, if one looks at it closely, it is possible to see the negative impression of details, like the chimney with its soot, the door, the window, the tiles, the switch, or the door handle. All of these elements evoke a familiar dimension that everyone can recognize, which the artist froze in the chalk cast. The name of this work comes from Whiteread's aim to "mummify the air in the room"⁷. This is a "ghost" because it represents the soul and the interior of the house, it is its memory and its essence, made immutable by the artist.

Ghost was the anticipation of her later work titled *House*, for which Whiteread won the Turner Prize in 1993: it was the first time that this

⁷ *Rachel Whiteread: Ghost*, YouTube video, 8:10, published by National Gallery of Art, August 4, 2009, <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/audio-video/video/rachel-whiteread.html>.

prize was assigned to a woman. Instead of a single room, Whiteread made the cast of an entire Victorian house. This work was commissioned by the London organization Artangel, in order to preserve the last Victorian house that had survived to the demolitions of the Mile End Park (Muir 2012: 180). Also in this case, Whiteread was able to make the air solid and to freeze the memories of the family that inhabited the house, until the government forced them to leave it before the demolition.

Even the severe YBA critic, Julian Stallabrass, agrees on judging Whiteread's work as dense of meaning and herself as a very serious artist (Stallabrass 2006: 102). Her way of representing the spectral old, familiar environments is very touching, though never pathetic. Masterpieces such as *Ghost* or *House* can be considered highly sensitive creations, two monuments to the daily life and to memory (Stallabrass 2006: 181).

5. Conclusions

It is well known that art will often – for example, in pictures – precede the perceptible reality by years. It was possible to see streets or rooms that shone in all sorts of fiery colors long before technology, by means of illuminated signs and other arrangements, actually set them under such a light. [...] Yet, fashion is in much steadier, much more precise contact with the coming thing [...]. Each new season brings, in its newest creations, various secret signals of the things to come. Whoever understands how to read these semaphores would know in advance not only about new currents in the arts but also about new legal codes, wars, and revolutions. Here, surely, lies the greatest charm of fashion, but also the difficulty of making the charming fruitful. (Benjamin 2002: 63-4)

McQueen and Whiteread's works were born from a common reflection on their contemporary society and from the perception of the same fears and anxieties. The fashion designers that Evans defines at the edge, among which McQueen, overcame the boundaries that delimited the fashion world, just like Duchamp or Warhol overcame the limits of art (Tamburi 2017). If, as asserted by Benjamin, fashion and its novelties are signals of what is still to come, *Savage beauty* could be more than a temporary phenomenon, but rather the anticipation of a broader inclusion of fashion in the art domain. After the commodities introduced by the Pop art, accessories and fabrics could become new art media to represent the present.

This possibility to accept the work of some designers as artistic expression could be a source of skepticism, since fashion is often judged conceptually simpler than other forms of art, because of its immediate appearance and strong materiality. However, in *The abuse of beauty*, Danto wrote, as we have seen, that art can no longer be judged only for its aesthetics. This is true also for McQueen's creations, because this designer revolutionized the common concept of beauty that was widely shared by the fashion system. His grotesque style was so shocking because perfection had always been a must in fashion and the concept of beauty was much more rigid than in art. However, it seems that fashion, just like art, had to accept that beauty was not suited to express the wounds of contemporary times.

Tim Blanks interviewed Sarah Burton, creative director of Alexander McQueen, now at the head of the brand, who was asked if McQueen considered himself as an artist:

I don't know. Lee [Alexander McQueen] wanted to go back to art college. He actually got into the Slade School to do art, but he always called himself a designer, not an artist. He was a showman more than anything. Still, when you think about the way he designed, it did feel more about art. It was never "Oh, is that comfortable?". It was all about the vision and the head-to-toe look of it. When you saw the models lined up, it was so clear and so direct. Lee was a designer who was making a world and telling a story. Sometimes it was on such a level that maybe the fashion audience wasn't the right audience to tell it to, but what audience was right? That's the problem I think he had. The stigma: is it fashion? Is it art? [...] He created a world for himself where he could do anything he wanted to do, with no constraints, no merchandiser coming upstairs and asking, "Where's my three-button jacket?". That's very unusual in fashion. (Bolton 2011: 231)

McQueen's work can be defined at the edge because many times it seemed to be closer to art than fashion, and for this reason it gained a place in museums and art galleries. The novelty of this process is that contemporary fashion has become independent from art and established its own intrinsic value, which endures even outside the runways and boutiques.

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